

The Ranger Review

Montezuma Castle, Montezuma Well, & Tuzigoot National Monuments

The Scoop on Prickly Pear

By Ranger Sharlot Hart

Prickly Pear. Just the name seems like a contradiction. Prickly is bad and Pear is delicious. Those fruits, though, which are so ripe and red and inviting this time of year do prick and bite. Not only do they have the big needles we’re all very aware that come on cacti, they also have glochids: tiny, almost can’t-see -’em needles covering the fruits. If you can figure out a way around the needles and glochids, however, you’ll get that delicious treat and much more.

The easiest way around all those biting parts of the prickly pear cacti is to buy the fruits or pads (also called nopales) in a grocery store. Or, try them in a restaurant or purchase pre-made jelly. If you happen to have a nice plant in your back yard, a good pair of gloves is advisable. However you get them though, it turns out that both the fruits and those uninviting pads are fairly healthy to eat. Which is not only important to us, but also to the ancient Sinagua who lived here hundreds of years ago.

Today, you can find ads for drinks made of the “superfruit” of the prickly pear or for herbal supplements all promising some benefit. While I do not intend to support the claims of these products, what I can say is that research shows nopales to have a high content of soluble fiber, vitamins and minerals, and they may help reduce incidences of diabetes. This all sounds great for us today, but it was great for the Sinagua who didn’t have so much of their food goods imported from else-

where. The Sinagua farmed, hunted, and gathered everything they needed to survive from the desert. Today that sounds like an amazing feat, something we couldn’t do. But just as we learn from our parents which stores are best, the Sinagua learned from their communities which plants held which important items they needed. Rope to make ladders and sandals from yucca, medicines from the creosote, and the list goes on. So, imagine in this veritable mega-store of the desert, a green vegetable which is available all year long. Add to that the fact that aloe isn’t native to Arizona, so the Sinagua would likely have used the inner part of the prickly pear to relieve burns, and you might start to think that the prickly pear is a “super plant”.

The next time you are trying grilled nopal or some jelly from the bookstore, think about the many people who loved and ate the prickly pear before you. Life was hard, but the prickly pear made it a bit better.



Prickly Pear Fruit on the plant (right) and sliced open (left). Photo courtesy of edibleplantproject.org.

Black birds are found in many parts of the world. The Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) is one of them. Ravens are found all over North America and typically in areas that are rural. After years of persecution, mostly they tend to shy away from human influences. This wasn't always the way it was.

There are stories and tales told from all over the world about ravens and the tricks they played, the lessons they taught, or their heroic deeds for other animals and for humanity. Their roles have been linked with creation as well as death. The stories about these amazing birds run as far as the east is from the west and each one is unique; much like the bird itself.

The Common Raven is in the Family known as Corvidae along with Crows, Jays, Magpies, Rooks, Nutcrackers, Jackdaws, Treepies, and Choughs. This Family of birds is most widely known for its intelligence. Ravens alone are incredible mimics and have 45 different vocalizations with different meanings. This alone is impressive, but they can also learn and comprehend human languages! They have complex throat muscles that allow them to form human language phrases among other noises such as dogs barking, children screaming, hands clapping, etc.

Not only this, but ravens have the intellect to use this form of mimicry in new situations. So not only can they learn the noises, but they have the brain power to use them in a context to communicate. This level of intellect observed in these birds is the same as observed in ape species!

As humans, we are just starting to come back to a better relationship with ravens. There is no longer a bounty on them as there once was, and they are protected in many states under the Migratory Species

Act from hunting. Once again we are learning to live together as we once did.

You see, ravens and humans are not so very different in many ways. We both play games. We speak and learn language from those around us. We are omnivores (eat both meat and vegetables). We have family groups. And we are both intelligent species who have adapted to survive many changes in our world over time.

The next time you are at one of the Verde Valley Monuments, take some time to stop and talk with and listen to the ravens. You never know what wisdom they may share with you or what stories they will tell.



Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) in flight. Photo courtesy of John Asher, 2010.



National Park Service
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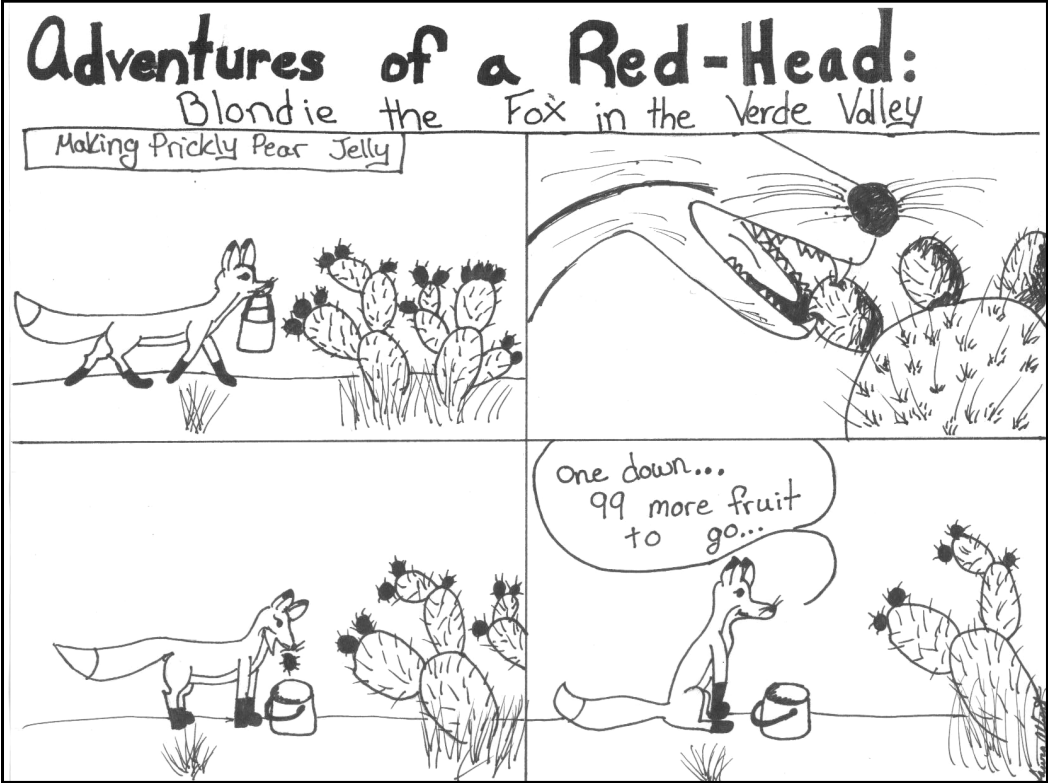
Park Happenings & Funny Pages

By Ranger Laura Albert

The Ranger Review is designed to give you more information about what to see and do while visiting our sites. We hope that you enjoy seeing our parks from a Ranger's point of view!

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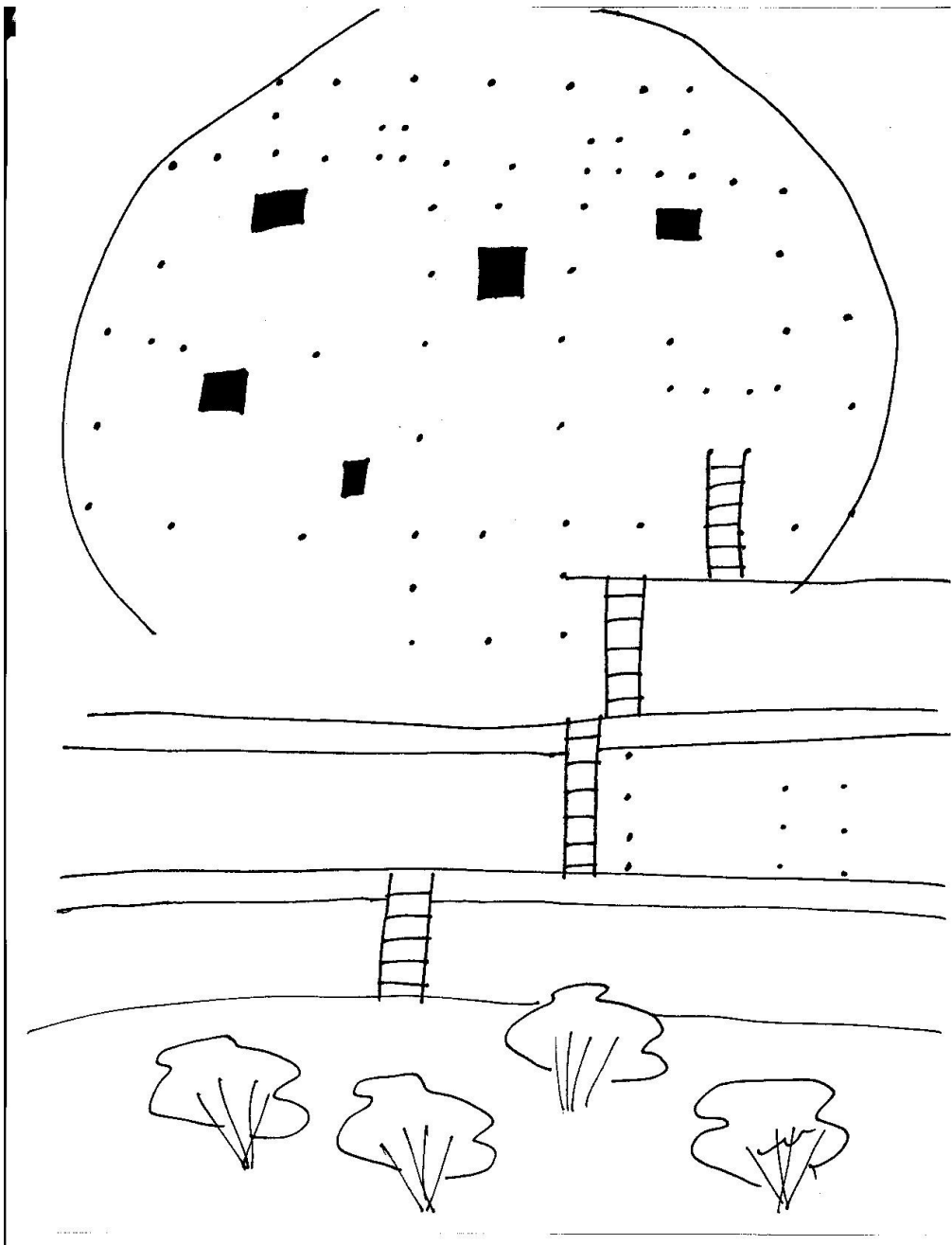
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Jr. Ranger Page

Connect the Dots

Connect the dots to build Montezuma Castle.



View Through the Lens

Upcoming Events:

August 29– September 11, 2010

No Major Events at this time. Happy Labor Day!



A Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) makes a guest appearance to the Chief Ranger at Montezuma Castle National Monument. Photo by Penny Wagner.

Did you know?



NPS employee staffing the Tuzigoot Visitor's Center. NPS archives.

The museum at Tuzigoot National Monument opened it's doors in 1936. The building as you see it today at one point housed a caretaker and a laboratory for processing artifacts in the back where offices now reside. All of the display cases and chairs in the museum were actually made by the local high school in Clarkdale.